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UDK 338.48 6:005(497.113)

DOI 10.5937/turpos0-52814

SUSTAINABLE CONFERENCE TOURISM AS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS TOURISM: THE CASE OF HOTEL NORCEV

ODRŽIVI KONGRESNI TURIZAM KAO PREDUSLOV RAZVOJA POSLOVNOG TURIZMA U BUDUĆNOSTI: STUDIJA SLUČAJA HOTEL NORCEV

Abstract: *This paper examines the role of sustainable conference tourism as a key prerequisite for the future development of business tourism, focusing on Hotel Norcev on Fruška Gora. The paper analyzes sustainable development and its impact on the competitiveness and success of business tourism in the future. The subject of the study is to explore the role of sustainable conference tourism as a crucial factor for the future development of business tourism. Paper started from the initial hypothesis that sustainability is a key factor for the development of business tourism. The tasks of the study included investigating and analyzing sustainable conference tourism, analyzing factors significant for business tourism, conducting research among hotel guests, analyzing the collected results, and developing recommendations for sustainable operations. The results showed that the application of sustainable principles significantly enhances the hotel's competitiveness and suggests the implementation of ecological practices in all segments of business tourism.*

Keywords: *MICE tourism, business tourism, sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable tourism*

Apstrakt: *U ovom radu se ispituje uloga održivog konferencijskog turizma kao ključnog preduslova za budući razvoj poslovnog turizma, sa fokusom na hotel Norčev na Fruškoj gori. U radu se analizira održivi razvoj i njegov uticaj na konkurentnost i uspeh poslovnog turizma u budućnosti. Predmet studije je istraživanje uloge održivog konferencijskog turizma kao ključnog faktora za budući razvoj poslovnog turizma. Rad je počeo od početne hipoteze da je održivost ključni faktor za razvoj poslovnog turizma. Zadaci studije obuhvatali su istraživanje i analizu održivog konferencijskog turizma, analizu faktora značajnih za poslovni turizam, sprovođenje istraživanja među hotelskim gostima, analizu prikupljenih rezultata i donošenje preporuka za održivo poslovanje. Rezultati su pokazali da primena principa održivosti značajno povećava konkurentnost hotela i sugerise primenu ekoloških praksi u svim segmentima poslovnog turizma.*

Ključne reči: *MICE turizam, poslovni turizam, održivost, održivi razvoj, održivi turizam*

Introduction

Sustainable tourism aims to achieve a harmonious balance of ecological, socio-cultural, and economic factors in the environment while ensuring tourist satisfaction (Ahmadi et al., 2018). The goal of the concept is to discover the ideal approach for tourism development without depleting resources, ensuring that future generations can fulfill their tourism needs (Čurčić et al., 2021). To fully realize the concept of sustainable tourism, it is necessary to establish sustainability indicators that will serve as the basis for a comprehensive evaluation (Germanovich et al., 2020). Furthermore, through strategic development and the implementation of effective sustainability measures, tourist destinations have the opportunity to contribute significantly to the local economy while preserving the natural, built, and socio-cultural environment. This not only enhances community well-being but also ensures that visitors have exceptional experiences (Nunkoo et al., 2020).

The term MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) or MI (Meeting Industry) was first mentioned in 2006. This term is mainly used by experts in the field but is more commonly known to the public as business tourism (Ladkin, 2006). This industry stimulates the development of cultural and historical tourism, leading to increased popularity of certain tourist destinations as well as investment inflows. An additional benefit of these events is the exchange of knowledge and contacts. Business events include various conventions, congresses, conferences, seminars, workshops, training sessions, and symposiums, with the primary objective of information exchange. This industry is most prevalent in Europe and Asia (Thommandru et al., 2023).

Considering the constant changes in the tourism market, it is essential for tourist destinations to adapt to the market and tourist needs. Business tourism is occupying an increasingly significant share of the tourism market (Čurčić et al., 2021). According to research by Germanovich et al. (2020), a si-

gnificant 70% of conference participants not only have business intentions but also exhibit typical tourist needs. This highlights the positive effect of the growth in conference tourism. Nunkoo et al. (2020) concluded that converting conference guests into leisure tourists leads to an overall increase in tourism, particularly through the rise in repeat visitors. It is estimated that every dollar spent on business travel generates an impressive return on investment of 9.50 dollar (Nunkoo et al., 2020).

Economic development in new destinations is driven by factors such as improving the business environment, increasing employment opportunities, expanding exports, and attracting foreign investors. As a result, these new destinations start to generate demand for conference activities. Initially focusing on their own nation, infrastructure and events were established, and later expanded to other countries. In these new locations, where economic development and standards were previously lower, there was no opportunity to participate in the conference market. However, as these markets developed, demand and potential participants emerged (Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012).

Tourist destinations are locations that are continually evolving and possess a unique mix of natural, built, and socio-cultural resources and assets, each receiving varying degrees of state support and displaying different levels of innovation, competition, and uniqueness. The key to a successful destination lies in applying effective and sustainable strategies for planning and monitoring its operations. It is crucial for governments, businesses, and community members who share interests to collaborate harmoniously to achieve a sustainable outcome in tourism. Additionally, it is necessary to establish a unique and recognizable identity for destinations, which will serve as the basis for their positioning and promotional efforts. Long-term sustainability of tourist destinations can only be achieved through the application of effective strategies and actions.

When business guests travel to a location other than their usual place of residence,

they seek to meet their business needs (Quaranta et al., 2016). These needs include educational purposes, training sessions, giving presentations, selling products, expanding the client base, exploring new markets, conducting presentations, and networking with new individuals. The longevity of businesses and associations, along with their ability to adapt to market changes, is enabled through professional management that encompasses the organization of conferences, events, and overall activities. This includes setting strategic guidelines and ensuring the operational implementation of daily operations, thereby fostering flexibility and adaptability (Wijijayanti et al., 2023).

The research started from the hypothesis H that sustainability is a prerequisite for the growth of business tourism, suggesting that hotels will have to follow all sustainability principles to stay competitive and thrive in the dynamic and evolving business tourism market. The subject of the study is sustainable business tourism, its significance for the future, and its impact on business guests. The aim of this research is to examine the role of sustainable conference tourism in the future. The paper will analyze current trends in sustainable business tourism, issues faced by destinations and hotels, and provide recommendations for implementing sustainable development in tourism. By examining economic, ecological, and social aspects, the paper will also illustrate how to enhance the competitiveness of destinations and hotels.

The results presented in this paper indicate that primary efforts should focus on educating tourism employees and tourists. It is important to choose ecological options, from transportation to the destination, stay at the destination, and departure. The future of sustainable business tourism is reflected in the use of electric vehicles, hybrids, or biofuels, as well as utilizing all natural resources for generating electricity (e.g., solar panels, natural hot springs). Business travel continues to grow each year, providing further motivation for the development of sustainable tourism to preserve natural resources.

Considering that natural resources are one of the crucial factors in business tourism, their preservation is also vital.

Methodology

Guests of Hotel Norcev on Fruška Gora were surveyed from March 2023 to March 2024. Guests were asked a series of questions that required responses on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. A score of 1 indicated minimal agreement with the statement (strongly disagree), while a score of 5 indicated complete agreement (strongly agree). The questions related to the quality of the hotel's operations and its adaptation to sustainable business principles in hospitality. The questions included:

- Importance of traveling by personal vehicle
- Importance of having a pool at the hotel
- Importance of internet access at the hotel
- Importance of the hotel's location
- Importance of contactless cards at the hotel
- Importance of marked walking trails
- Importance of sports facilities and wellness services

To obtain the most accurate responses, Pearson Chi-Square analysis was conducted. When Pearson Chi-Square (p) is greater than 0.05, it indicates no statistical significance in respondents' answers concerning gender; smaller values indicate differences in responses.

Fruška Gora is one of the five national parks in Serbia and, as such, is a location of exceptional natural and cultural-historical significance. It supports various types of tourism: sports and recreational, health and wellness, cultural and event-based, scientific, and nautical. Due to its natural beauty and surroundings (beautiful landscapes, numerous hiking and trekking trails), proximity to the capital, good infrastructure, and cultural-historical attractions, it has significant potential for the development of business tourism.

Hotel Norcev is located near the Iriški Venac on Fruška Gora, one of the most fa-

mous and visited peaks in this national park. In the current edition, Hotel Norcev has been present since 2003. The hotel achieves approximately 12,000 overnight stays annually, with half consisting of business tourists. Monthly, 2.3 business events are organized, with the most common being seminars, team-building activities, and training sessions. The hotel does not collaborate with local suppliers and does not contribute to sustainable operations. The facility offers 39 rooms and 5 suites, a conference hall with seating for 250, and 2 meeting rooms that can each hold 30 people, as well as additional amenities such as a swimming pool and a sauna. With its long tradition, Hotel Norcev is a symbol of quality accommodation and offers a unique blend of natural beauty. The Iriški Venac, as part of the offer, provides numerous opportunities for recreation and enjoyment in nature,

from hiking to cultural events. This offer is of significant importance due to the experience it provides to tourists.

Results and discussion

Reviewing Table 1, it can be concluded that the survey involved 104 male and 103 female respondents. They answered a set of questions related to the importance and significance of sustainability in business tourism. The first conclusion is that both men and women are equally involved in business travel (Vuković et al., 2023), reflecting modern trends and supporting the view of scholars such as Pécot et al. (2024). According to these scholars, gender equality in business travel represents a primary prerequisite for the sustainability of conference or MICE tourism (Byrne Swain et al., 2024).

Table 1. Importance of Traveling by Personal Vehicle

		Gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
How important is it for you to travel by personal car to the accommodation?	3	2	6	8
	4	7	17	24
	5	95	80	175
Total		104	103	207

Source: Autor's research

Traveling by personal vehicle has its advantages: the ability to adjust departure times, use of air conditioning, and making stops at times and places of one's choice. It provides comfort and flexibility that other modes of transportation do not offer. According to Hu et al. (2024), 90% of all business travel worldwide is conducted by car, whether it's personal vehicles or rental cars. For business people, "time is money," which is why the responses seen in Table 1 are not surprising. Looking at the table, it can be concluded that

the majority of respondents indicated that it is very important for them to travel by car for business trips. The downside of this mode of travel is environmental pollution due to CO² emissions. There is a need to consider the use of electric or hybrid cars to help reduce harmful gas emissions. These types of vehicles are the future for both leisure and business travel. To meet market demands in MICE tourism, government assistance through various subsidies will be essential to facilitate the purchase of such vehicles.

Table 2. Pearson Chi-Square Test

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7,448 ^a	2	0,24

Source: Autor's research

Table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in respondents' answers based on gender. Both male and female respondents have a need to travel

by personal car, which aligns with the data presented in the previous table and indicates further steps regarding the sustainability of business tourism.

Table 3. Importance of Having a Swimming Pool in the Hotel

		Gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
Is it important for the accommodation to have a swimming pool?	3	1	6	7
	4	8	20	28
	5	95	77	172
Total		104	103	207

Source: Autor's research

Table 3 indicates that having a swimming pool within the hotel is important to people. Nowadays, it is expected that a hotel will have a swimming pool and additional amenities. In today's world, where people work long hours and live hectic lives, there

is a growing need for relaxation and time in nature. For business travelers, it is crucial to unwind and enjoy the hotel's pool and additional facilities after a demanding workday (Xu, Luo, 2023).

Table 4. Pearson Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10,593 ^a	2	0,05

Source: Autor's research

Table 4 also shows, as with the previous table, that there are no statistically significant differences in responses based on gender. Both men and women consider the presence of a swimming pool in the hotel to be important. Places for relaxation, unwinding, and resting after business meetings and conferences are becoming a "new necessity" and

are crucial for the sustainable development of business tourism (Penić et al., 2026). Numerous studies support the observation that the need for health and relaxation is one of the primary needs of today's tourists (Vujko, Gajić, 2014; Vujko, Delić-Jović, 2024; Bojović et al., 2024).

Table 5. – Importance of Internet in the Hotel

		Gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
Is it important for the accommodation to have good internet and a secure connection?	3	2	2	4
	4	21	22	43
	5	81	79	160
Total		104	103	207

Source: Autor's research



In the era of significant technological advancement, smartphones, and artificial intelligence, it is expected that good internet connectivity is a given in accommodations. Access to and good internet connection are important for all tourists, but they are especially crucial for business travelers. Most business events (meetings, conferences, panels) involve presentations, online event following or remote participation by spea-

kers. It can be said that reliable internet is a prerequisite for hosting a business event (Rajesh et al., 2022). As Hotel Norceev hosts numerous business events, having a good internet connection is essential to ensure these events proceed smoothly. This is confirmed by the results shown in Table 5, where guests of Hotel Norceev indicated that a secure and reliable internet connection is very important to them.

Table 6. *Pearson Chi-Square Test*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10,593 ^a	2	0,05

Source: *Autor's research*

Since $p=0.05$ in Table 6, the results do not show significant differences in responses based on gender. The answers regarding the

importance of having a good internet connection are consistent across both genders.

Table 7. – *Importance of Hotel Location*

		Gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
Is it important to you that the accommodation is isolated, outside the city?	3	6	2	8
	4	18	11	29
	5	80	90	170
Total		104	103	207

Source: *Autor's research*

In the past, most people lived in villages or smaller communities. Rural life involves hard work but also provides a healthier lifestyle for the entire family, primarily due to the ability to grow your own food and spend most of your time in clean air (Zečević et al., 2021). One of the advantages brought by the coronavirus pandemic is the possibility of working from home. Since most business travelers live and work in urban environments, spending time in enclosed spaces with views of city streets, a change of scenery to a more natural setting is extremely pleasant. Due to the overall lifestyle associa-

ted with city living, people are increasingly returning to their roots and the connection they have with nature. Just the sight of nature and greenery during a business event can relax and make participants more productive. After completing their work, guests at the hotel can engage in activities like strolling, biking through natural landscapes, or hiking. (Tok et al., 2024). This way, the unbreakable bond between humans and nature is being restored. The results shown in Table 7 suggest that business travelers prefer a hotel surrounded by nature rather than one in the city center.

Table 8. *Pearson Chi-Square Test*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10,593 ^a	2	0,05

Source: *Autor's research*

Table 8. Like the previous responses, this table shows that there are no significant differences in responses based on gender.

Table 9. – Importance of Contactless Cards in the Hotel

		Gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
Is it important to you that the accommodation offers contactless key transfer?	3	2	6	8
	4	8	28	36
	5	94	69	163
Total		104	103	207

Source: *Autor’s research*

In today’s era of digitalization, hotels are expected to provide contactless cards (Han et al., 2024). These cards allow for quick and easy room access with a single swipe in front of a sensor, which is the primary reason for the results shown in Table 9. This type of card is also more sustainable because if a guest loses their room key, the card can simply be deactivated via a computer in a few easy steps. In contrast, with a traditional lock

and key, the entire lock needs to be replaced and a new key issued. These cards also help control electricity consumption. When a guest exits the room and removes the card from the reader, the electricity in the room is automatically turned off. This reduces irrational energy use, prevents safety risks to people and property, and promotes sustainable hotel operations (Liu et al., 2024).

Table 10. Pearson Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10,593 ^a	2	0,05

Source: *Autor’s research*

The results shown in Table 10 indicate that there are no significant differences in responses based on gender. Both men and

women consider the use of cards in hotels to be important.

Table 11. Importance of Existing Marked Walking Trails

		Gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
Is it important to you that there are marked walking trails in the vicinity of the accommodation, in green areas or by rivers?	3	2	4	6
	4	7	23	30
	5	95	76	171
Total		104	103	207

Source: *Autor’s research*

The responses to this question, as shown in Table 11, further confirm the respondents’ preference for staying in natural surroundings. It is well-known that physical activity increases serotonin levels, often referred to as the “happiness hormone.” Engaging in recreational

activities and spending time in nature strengthens both the physical and mental aspects of the human body. Business tourists, in this way, become more productive and better prepared for the challenges their work presents (Vujko, Delić-Jović, 2021; Gajić et al., 2019).

Table 12. Pearson Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11,307 ^a	2	0,04

Source: *Autor's research*

Table 12 shows that there are no statistically significant differences in the responses between genders, as walking in nature is equally important to everyone.

Table 13. Importance of Sports Facilities and Wellness

		Gender?		Total
		Male	Female	
Is it important to you that the accommodation has sports facilities and a wellness center?	3	2	5	7
	4	9	16	25
	5	93	82	175
Total		104	103	207

Source: *Autor's research*

Since most guests of this type spend 8 hours a day sitting in front of a computer screen, which can be exhausting, they will greatly benefit from some form of physical activity. This is supported by the results shown in Table 13. The combination of relaxation and

recreation helps to bring the body and mind into harmony. These activities contribute to personal rehabilitation, which in turn impacts better business results for individuals and organizations (Vujko et al., 2018; Bojović et al., 2024).

Table 14. Pearson Chi-Square Test

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3,932 ^a	2	1,40

Source: *Autor's research*

People are increasingly aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, as confirmed by Table 14 ($p=0.140$), which shows no statistically significant differences in responses based on gender. For business travelers, sports facilities are important because they allow them to participate in group sports, such as soccer or basketball, with their colleagues, thereby strengthening team spirit.

Based on the results of this study, the initial hypothesis that sustainability is a key prerequisite for the development of business tourism has been confirmed. The analysis of these results shows that respondents are satisfied with the implementation of sustainability principles, which subsequently leads to long-term success and competitiveness for hotels.

Conclusion

It is concluded that sustainable development is one of the key factors for the further growth of business tourism and provides various economic, ecological, and social solutions. The global tourism market and tourist expectations are constantly evolving, making sustainability an increasingly important component in both business tourism and other sectors of the industry. The positive effects of implementing sustainability principles include environmental preservation, strengthening local communities, and enhancing the reputation of destinations and hotels.

Sustainable development, in addition to preserving cultural heritage and educating travelers, promotes the use of environmentally friendly materials and energy-efficient

technologies. Destinations and hotels should adopt and adhere to sustainable development measures to better position themselves in the market. This satisfies the needs of business travelers who seek responsible and ethically acceptable options, thereby becoming more competitive in the market. It is concluded that applying sustainable development in business tourism is not only ethically correct but also strategically wise, ensuring long-term sustainability and success in the global market.

In the future, "Green Hotels" will be increasingly prevalent, along with the application of sustainable event organization using environmentally friendly materials (recycled or biodegradable materials) and zero-waste principles to reduce waste. It is recommended to introduce ecological standards and certifications for event organization, support local communities, promote sustainable transportation, educate people at destinations, and develop and promote sustainable destinations. Strategies to reduce waste should include recycling processes, reducing the use of single-use products, and using digital materials instead of printed ones. It is also recommended to attend virtual meetings when possible to contribute to the reduction of CO² emissions. Important aspects to address include raising awareness among tourism employees and informing visitors about sustainability through apps, websites, and promotional materials. The final task is to monitor and report on sustainable practices and their results to encourage their continued development.

Acknowledgment: This research was supported by The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, GRANT No. 7739076, Tourism Destination Competitiveness - Evaluation Model for Serbia - TOURCOMSERBIA.

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